

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE  
WITH BRIGADIER GENERAL EDWARD CARDON,  
ASSISTANT DIVISION COMMANDER, 3RD INFANTRY DIVISION

MODERATOR: LIEUTENANT COMMANDER BROOK DEWALT

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MR. DEWALT: Okay, if everybody's okay with this, sir, I'll go ahead and make  
these initial comments -- (inaudible) -- our recording.

I'm sorry, who just dialed in?

Q This is Charlie Quidnunc at Whizbang.

MR. DEWALT: Hi, Charlie. This is Lieutenant Commander Brook DeWalt. We -- we're going to go ahead and get things rolling here. So I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable for Thursday, May 10th, 2007. Today we're honored to have as our guest, from Iraq, Brigadier General Edward Cardon, deputy commanding general of Multinational Division Center, and he'll be providing us with an operational update today.

For the bloggers, please remember to clearly state your name and your blog or other organization with which you're affiliated, and please respect the general's time and keep your questions succinct and to-the-point.

With that said, General, welcome, and do you have any opening statements?

GEN. CARDON: Yes. I have a -- probably about a four-minute statement here I'd like to run through real quick, and then I'm really looking forward to the questions.

MR. DEWALT: Great. Go right ahead, sir.

GEN. CARDON: Okay. Good morning, I'm Brigadier General Ed Cardon. And most of you are aware that the 3rd Infantry Division Headquarters deployed to Baghdad in March, and this is our third deployment to Iraq in the past four years. We were already programmed to come to Iraq, but to replace the 25th Infantry Division as the headquarters of Multidivision North. But as a result of the surge, this has changed and now we have become what is now a new divisional area, the Multinational Division Center. And we are inextricably linked to the security of Baghdad.

There's a lot of talk about what they call the "flow of accelerants." And accelerants, the way we define them, they're stated as the physical components that facilitate violence and perpetuate further instability. And a lot of these, as you know come from the -- come from the south.

So who's part of the division right now? Well, we have the 4th Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division from Fort Richardson, Alaska; we have the 3rd Brigade of our own division from Fort Benning, Georgia; we have the 2nd Brigade from the 10th Mountain Division from Fort Drum; and one of our other brigades from 3rd Infantry Division is actually attached out of Multinational Division West, with the Marines at al-Anbar Province, and they're stationed in Ramadi.

All of the brigades that are part of the surge will be here in June and we'll continue to grow as our combat aviation brigade and our 2nd Brigade combat team are currently both in Kuwait and are due to be up here within the next 30 days, and that will complete the flow of forces for the surge.

For -- I think someone came in later -- they asked where our areas are. We have southern Baghdad, two of the Qadhas around -- in the province of Baghdad. The Muqdadiya province in the Madain -- or Muqdadiya Qadha and the Madain Qadha, and

then the provinces of Babil, Najaf and Karbala, with the expectation in the future that we'll also pick up the -- Wasit Province. So mainly focused to the south.

The Iraqi government is getting a little bit stronger, we think, providing some breathing room, which was the whole intent of the surge. Clearly -- that this is my third trip here -- the Iraqi Security Forces in our area are certainly much more capable. Economic development is better, but that has an awful long way to go. And we continue to be amazed by the resilience of the Iraq people. As part of the surge, there were also these embedded provincial reconstruction teams. We have two of those, and I'm more than happy to talk about those during the questions.

As a realistic approach, we have some significant challenges. First we have al Qaeda and al Qaeda-affiliated Sunni extremists in our area. We also face Shi'a extremist networks, which have their own sectarian agendas which are clearly counterproductive, and there's clear evidence that some of these extremists receive their support, financing and training outside of Iraq. Just recently in Karbala, where five of our soldiers were killed in the Provincial Joint Coordination Center attack on 20 January, we just had another car bomb go off there on the 28th of April that killed 55 and wounded 12. And in both cases here, what's significant is that the Karbala provincial government and Iraq Security Forces who we've met with recently handled all of this on their own. They did not need any help from the coalition forces, and I think that's a significant improvement in a very important area for the -- for Iraq.

What's even more incredible about this is despite this, we didn't see any reprisal attacks or sectarian homicides. And there are still areas within our operational environment where we have Sunnis and Shi'a living together. And the way we kind of measure that is you see children from both sects attending the same schools, and so this violence that's there in some portions of Baghdad has not necessarily spread throughout the country.

The other positive thing is we're getting a lot of reports that the Iraqi citizens are pretty fed up with this violence, and we're starting to see actually in some cases -- like has happened in al Anbar, where the tribes are actually fighting al Qaeda or al Qaeda-associated extremists, and we're having some of that in our area as well, and that's very, very encouraging.

Political developments going in a positive direction. I think the local governments are becoming a lot stronger, have greater legitimacy, even though we still haven't had our provincial elections. And -- but they are filling a void. We're very distributed. The difference this time is that rather than being on large FOBs, we actually have our soldiers right now spread out across 26 different joint security stations, combat outposts, patrol bases or forward operating bases. But that's not without some cost. Since April 1st, we've lost 14 soldiers in enemy attacks, 39 wounded, and most of them still come from improved (sic) explosive devices. And some of this technology, financing and training clearly comes from Iran.

How do we know this? Well, on the 22nd, in a U.S.-Iraqi joint raid in Muqdadiya we found three caches containing mortar systems, rockets, ammunition, and there's date stamps and Iranian markings on all of the ammunition. And so we have some -- have a lot of work to do with that. We're not going to be able to eliminate violence on our own and with a simple military approach, so we're working really hard on training the Iraqi Security Forces and building the capacity of the Iraqi government, and that's the primary role of these embedded provincial reconstruction teams.

If I could just close my opening statement here with a personal expression of gratitude for the services of our soldiers and to the families that support them, and thank you all personally for your continued support. And I'm ready to take your questions.

MR. DEWALT: Okay. Thank you very much, General. For the bloggers, let's go ahead and begin questions. I'd like to call on people in the order in which you had dialed in. And please remember, state your name and your blog or organization, and if anybody does have something that ties in very directly and you need to jump in for a follow-on, feel free. But again remember please state your name and your organization.

And let's begin with Andrew Lubin.

Q Good morning, General. This is Andrew Lubin from -- a senior editor at ON Point. My question is more Anbar-Ramadi oriented, because I've just come back from there. You mentioned a second ago you have around 26 JSSs/outposts in the Baghdad area. Ramadi alone probably has 50. Don't we need more people? I mean, Baghdad's a city of how many million people, compared to Ramadi? Is 26 enough?

GEN. CARDON: Well, our area is not in Baghdad central. It's in the rural areas to the south --

Q Okay.

GEN. CARDON: -- in Mahmudiyah, Latifiyah, Suwayra. It comes around through Salman Pak, all the way up to Namal. So --

Q Yeah. I was down there in January, yeah. But 26 is an awful -- is not really many stations for a big area.

GEN. CARDON: It's -- with the brigades that we have, with the forces we have, that's what -- we have them -- for instance, the brigade that's in the south has 70 percent of its force living out amongst this rural population, and what we're working hard on is making sure all of our collection and surveillance devices -- as opposed to Ramadi, which is big and has, you know, two brigade combat teams and the Marines in there. There's a lot of force in there. The main force in Iraq is still concentrated inside of Baghdad, and what the purpose of MND Central was is to have enough force to prevent the accelerants from coming into Baghdad, so the brigades, eight brigades inside of Baghdad can really lock down the security situation there, in conjunction with brigades of Iraqi forces. And

so the number of combat outposts inside Baghdad is probably of -- I don't know this for sure, but probably of equivalent density to what's going on in Ramadi. But we're in a more rural area down to the south, and that's about what we can put out there right now.

Q Right. Okay, a follow-on?

GEN. CARDON: And we're having some effect.

Q Okay. Brook, can I ask a follow-on?

MR. DEWALT: Absolutely.

Q And I'll make it quick, for everybody else. When I was in Mahmudiyah in January -- it was -- I was down with 10th Mountain, and they were telling me that a year ago, give or take a bit, the population had been 80 percent Sunni, 20 percent Shi'a. But now, with JEM and everybody coming out, they've kind of -- they've ethnically cleansed, religiously cleansed it -- it's now 80 percent Shi'a, 20 percent Sunni. Is there any way -- I appreciate your trying to stop the accelerants coming from the outside. Is there any way to stop JEM from coming south and intimidate the Sunnis?

GEN. CARDON: Well, there's no doubt that JEM is trying to open what we call the central corridor straight down out of Baghdad, down to Karbala and Najaf. I would say what we have been successful at is we haven't had anymore flips of the population like that.

Q Okay.

GEN. CARDON: And -- is it perfect? No, but we're not seeing the sectarian violence that used to be there. My brigade combat team was in southern Baghdad and butted up against 210 Mountain's area, so I have a lot of familiarity with what goes on in that region.

But in the gap when there wasn't enough forces there, you are correct, the population flipped on Mahmudiyah, but we're not seeing the sectarian violence that we're seeing -- that was being reported even in January. Those numbers -- the murders and, you know, torture that you would normally see associated with sectarian violence, we're not seeing that.

Q Okay, excellent. Thank you very much.

MR. DEWALT: Great, thank you very much. Next question. Let's have Sean Mead.

Q Hi General, my name's Sean Mead and I'm with Defense Technology International. With your background in engineering, I wondered if you'd care to speak to any of the engineering challenges in your area of responsibility?

GEN. CARDON: Well, we're working pretty hard on infrastructure -- of course, we've been working on that for a couple of years. The Iraqis are -- finally recognize the importance of establishing some strategic infrastructure battalions. They're not as well-trained, but they're going to come underneath the Army which will be a huge improvement as opposed to working for their own ministries. I think that ought to be a big improvement.

There is a good opportunity to have lot more power coming into Baghdad this summer if we can work the political accommodations that we need to make sure that power actually makes it there -- and this is a focus area of ours. So I feel pretty good that we'll be able to bring at least some portion of this power into Baghdad. We're going to be most limited by the ability of the Iraqi government to put the symbiotic nature of oil and electricity together. So while we have more capacity to generate power, we'll be -- will we be (sic) able to generate the sufficient fuel to run those generators down in that power plant. But that's a -- we call that a positive accelerant. We want a positive accelerant into Baghdad, which is power, which could, of course, you know, I think will have an impact on the population and the fact that they're seeing something good on that front when we've actually had three summers that's been pretty rough.

A lot of our area is fairly rural, but the larger cities Hillah, Karbala and Najaf, they -- on the positive side is these provinces are finally getting money from the national government, and some of them in the hundreds of millions of dollars. But it's the spending of the billions of dollars that were -- the Iraqi government had that was unable to spend. And that's what these provincial reconstruction teams are helping us with. So one of our goals is to continue to work to connect local governments to provincial governments, provincial governments to national governments -- that enable that to happen. Because it's very -- the national government is very Baghdad-centric, and linking the government of Najaf to the Baghdad government -- and you can facilitate that by, when we're going into Najaf, bringing them with us and then setting up meetings with the ministries of Electricity, Ministry of Oil, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Oil, Ministry of Defense -- that's very, very helpful.

And so I'm -- I'm pretty encouraged that they're starting to develop their own capacity in this nature.

Q Great, thank you.

MR. DEWALT: Great, thank you. The next question -- let's have Richard Fernandez.

Q This is Richard Fernandez from Belmont Club. General Cardell (sic), what is the feasibility of stopping these accelerants from the south? Is there any real prospect of significantly reducing this?

GEN. CARDON: Well, I think in the -- we're seeing attacks go up right now in our area, so we're having some effect.

When I left here in January of 2006 with my brigade combat team -- and when I came back I was pretty shocked by the change. I felt that we had left in a pretty good state -- right after the national elections. And I sensed a little bit of a -- it's almost like the city was living in a little bit of fear. But in the two months I -- well, in a lot of fear, in some cases. In the two months that I've been here, I'm seeing some improvement.

Now, to stop these accelerants, the area that we're in has always been an area that's been sort of an "economy of force" area. And when the decision was made to put in Multinational Division Center -- it's an effort to have a division take all of its enablers and the forces down there -- and now it's much more of a focused effort for our division. So as before, when all this area belonged to the division in Baghdad -- because of everything going on in Baghdad, they didn't have much time to focus on these areas -- well, now this is our sole focus.

So I think over time we're going to definitely have some success as we continue to develop pretty intense intelligence networks, work hard on improving the Iraqi security forces down there, and continue to work on the political solutions that are necessary to really have some long-lasting capability here -- sustainability, because we can clear, we can take our military forces -- and we've done this many times -- and clear an area, but our ability to hold it and then build something there has always been the problem. And I think this time we have at least some of the capacity to be able to do that.

We're not going to stop a single car bomb, though, driving up the road; that's -- although we're starting to get some technology and stuff that's helping us. So you're in one of these events that -- one of these situations where, you know, one car bomb could go off, and you say, "Well, you're not stopping the accelerants." But we have been capturing lots of caches. What's been troubling to us is that, you know, the caches that we're picking up with Iranian markings, you know, with -- and it's clear it came from Iran. Now that's problematic, because that means they're getting resupplied. So there's a lot of work to do there.

Q Thank you.

MR. DEWALT: All right. Thank you. Next question. Let's have David Axe.

Q General, this is David Axe with the Aviation Week Group. Can you tell us more about the PRTs, their structure and their -- and some -- give some examples of some recent highlights of their activities?

GEN. CARDON: Yeah, the PRTs are very much a mixed news story. The embedded PRTs we just received work directly with the brigades. And they're only four-man teams right now, growing to 10. But the State Department clearly put some very quality Foreign Service officers in these teams, and it is obvious. And that is -- that's

very positive. And we've had them now for about three or four weeks. They're already making a difference.

In our area, in the southern provinces, Najaf has already gone to provincial control. So they're -- the governor of Najaf is responsible for the security in Najaf, and he's done a great job doing this so far. So the provincial teams down there are fairly small, but they help link him to the national government.

But we're trying to build some more capacity with the provincial reconstruction teams that enable them to do their jobs, because the problem with -- they don't have the security to really get around as much as they could. It is kind of unique situation down south, probably because of the large Shi'a population in the further reaches in the south, where they haven't had the threats. There wasn't this effort to put in these large provincial reconstruction teams like you see in Baghdad or up in Salahuddin, Diyala, some of these provinces.

But there's -- the State Department's looking at how to make that more effective and continue to build on the capacity to make the government stronger.

I'm a believer in PRTs, and my commitment to them -- and I've met all the leaders -- is, I'm going to help you do what you need to do. And so, you know, I'm making sure that they have aviation support, that they have ground security transportation, and that I'm working hard to make sure they are properly resourced from the embassy and from Multinational Forces Iraq.

Q So can you give me an example of one recent PRT mission that was particularly successful?

GEN. CARDON: I'm trying to think here. The PRTs -- well, right now there would be the date palm spraying going on down in Karbala. Date palms -- this has been a huge problem for three years. There's these insects that come out. They have to be sprayed within a six-week period. The Iraqis have had trouble executing this for some period of time. They started spraying with the helicopters a couple of days ago. The PRT helped the governor set this up, linked it to the national government, you know, got the -- got all the pieces together to make this happen. There was a lot of doubt, even a week ago, whether this was actually going to happen, but they're actually spraying now.

And this should have a dramatic improvement in the date crop, which -- Iraq used to be a net exporter of dates before, used to be a net exporter of grapes -- I'm not sure how far, but you know, they've really taken a toll since these insects. And that's just one small example of how they use it.

But I'm trying to get the PRTs to focus more on building government capacity and that's what they've been given direction on by Secretary Rice as well. So we're focused much more on their ability to execute their budget. They're good at executing the salary



portion. It's been harder for them to execute the capital side of their budget, to execute projects. It's been very difficult for them to do that.

Q Thank you.

MR. DEWALT: Okay, thank you. And next let's have Charlie Quidnunc.

Q Thank you. Yes, this is Charlie Quidnunc at the Whizbang blog podcast. General, one of my questions was about what your largest foe is? Who is the worst enemy that you have to face in your area of operations? Al Qaeda? Is it Shi'a? Is it Sunni or --

GEN. CARDON: I'll say for the soldier on the ground it's hard to tell it all apart, but the problem with al Qaeda -- I'm going to define this in two different -- depends on what you're trying to do -- the problem with al Qaeda is the car bombs, and car bombs put a lot of fear in Iraqis. And so a successful car bomb is a rough day for all of us, and that is primarily al Qaeda. The extremist Shi'a elements -- JAM elements -- Jaish al-Mahdi -- that fear is all over murders and so, you know, if you went down into a Shi'a area they would -- their main problem is, you know, al Qaeda comes in and sets off a car bomb and kills a bunch of them. If you go into the Sunni areas, they'll tell you like the question earlier, you know, Mark Medea (ph) that, you know, JAM's coming down and slaughtering Sunnis and forcing them from their homes. So it really depends on exactly where you're at as to what's really happening. Now, that's not happening right now that we know of in any large scale. I'm sure there's intimidation going on -- Iraq is a complex place. But we're not seeing the flip in structure like we saw in Mahmudiyah. We're not seeing that at all. I'm sure there's still intimidation going on and we've been working really hard against al Qaeda. And al Qaeda's also a very serious threat to U.S. forces in particular as well and, you know, we've -- for instance, they, you know, drove a huge car -- a truck bomb actually into one of our patrol bases and the soldiers weren't -- that were killed, you know, it destroyed -- it knocked all the walls down as well. So, you know, that's the size of the explosion. Those are al Qaeda. So depending on where you are and which unit you're in, you face these two primary threats.

Q Thank you.

MR. DEWALT: Great. Thank you. Does anybody have a second or follow-on question they'd like to ask?

Q Yeah, I do, if you don't mind. General, you have time for one more or a couple more?

GEN. CARDON: Oh, absolutely -- yeah.

Q Andrew Lubany (ph) of Longpoints (ph). General, I was in Ramadi a couple weeks ago and met the PRT team a couple weeks after they came in. I was at the Economic Reconstruction Council there. I understand that Secretary Rice wants them to

concentrate on the -- building government services. But we're sending over people who are tax experts and zoning experts. Aren't we trying to build them up to an American standard that they're probably years away from reaching? These are cities that don't have sewage -- don't have electricity, and we're worried about zoning?

GEN. CARDON: Yeah. Well, that's -- I hope we're not doing that but I'll give you an example like the PR --

Q I met the people and I apologize but it's -- I was --

GEN. CARDON: Yeah.

Q -- appalled at their disinterest in going in the city, at the same time. They're going to bring people back to Camp Ramadi to talk to them. That's kind of dictating how we want things done and I kind of thought the Iraqis didn't like that.

GEN. CARDON: Well, I'm -- I mean, I can't speak for that but that's not what I -- that's not the way I'm pushing our PRTs. I'm very much -- Iraq has to lead Iraq and they were doing fine. Well, not fine, but under Saddam there were a lot of systems that did work, and we should not try and create American systems that have evolved over decades to -- and then impose it on them. You know, I've seen this -- (inaudible) -- thing like we're forming an electronic stock exchange. I think that's a waste. They had a stock exchange and they, you know, did it by paper like we did, you know, many years ago. If that's the way they want to do it, that's fine.

But certain areas -- we're trying to focus on what we can actually deliver. I'll use the Mundine Cotta (ph) as an example. You could say, "Well, you got to do something about the power out there." They've never had power out there. Everybody works off local generators. What they need help on is water projects. Al Qaeda blew up a big pump station out there. It's affected the entire water system. It's working at a degraded rate. What's exciting is that the Ministry of Agriculture is actually doing the work. The problem is they're getting sniped at. We're going to help them with some anti-sniper screens for some snipers to take care of those that are doing that, and some force protection, you know, in case somebody wants to try and use a car bomb or something against them. But the beauty is the Iraqis are doing that.

I view PRTs more as like okay, help them do that -- help them -- help the Ministry of Agriculture, like where are the things that are slowing this down. So instead of having one pipe show up over two days, maybe we can get some real progress here in a week. Another area is they want to repair a pipeline, for example. They have their repair teams, they coordinate with the Iraqi army to go out there, and then they can't seem to get the -- they forget to coordinate with the local tribes out there and they have difficulty. Well, that's something that the PRT could do to help when we put these things here together. The Iraqis try to do it on their own. I applaud them for doing that. It didn't work, and now it's like okay, here's what we got to do now -- we got to have a tribal sheikh meeting before we do this, and then we go in there and we're going to get something done. That's

where we want the PRTs to help, not implement zoning systems and all that. That's the first I've heard of that. I have one Foreign Service officer and then the other one is a -- actually all of ours are Foreign Service officers except for one who actually came. His background has been in I think public diplomacy. But he -- he's got some fire so it's better than what we had which was nothing. And so I -- we're going to make sure that he's properly resourced with the civil affairs and stuff that we can do, and the challenge is to spin these guys up fast so they understand Iraq culture because most of them are not Iraq experts. That's the real problem. And not that we are but you get that way after multiple tours here.

Q Great. Thank you.

MR. DEWALT: All right. Thank you very much. General, do you have any final comments you'd like to make?

GEN. CARDON: Well, first, I appreciate what you're all doing. I appreciate you covering the great work that these soldiers are doing out here, and Marines and airmen and Navy. We have -- our civil affairs battalion is headed up by a Navy captain who has an advanced degree in -- he's a vice president of marketing in a firm back in the United States. These are really some dedicated Americans over here doing something larger than themselves, and so for that I'm very thankful and I appreciate you covering their contributions.

And then I'd be remiss if I didn't say thanks to all the families who tolerate those of us who sign up for this, and support us, and then for the support of the American people that are behind us. And I, you know, they -- even though there's a lot of debate I rarely hear that they do not -- they say they support the troops. I have a trouble myself, of course, you know, supporting -- trying to differentiate -- how can you do one without the other. But I appreciate the support that is shown for all of the members of the armed forces over here doing something larger than themselves, and I just am proud to be part of that team.

MR. DEWALT: Great. Thank you, General Cardon. Thank you very much. We've had some great questions and comments today, and thank you, bloggers, as well. This Bloggers Round Table program will be available online for any of the bloggers needing this as a resource at [www.dodvclips.mil](http://www.dodvclips.mil) with the audio file. The full audio file, related photos, a print transcript, and the general's biography will all be available online at the Bloggers Round Table site on [DefendAmerica.mil](http://DefendAmerica.mil).

If any of you have any questions about this program please feel free to contact the Department of Defense, New Media Operations. My name is Lieutenant Commander Brook Dewalt and my number is 703-428-1204. Also, a related story will be written by Tim Kilbride (ph) for the American Forces Information Service -- American Forces Press Service. It'll be posted later today on the Defense Department website at [DefenseLink.mil](http://DefenseLink.mil). Again, thank you, General, and thank you, blogger participants, and this concludes today's event.

GEN. CARDON: Thank you very much. Brook, thank you also.

MR. DEWALT: Thank you all very much.

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